My Literate Life

Growing up with a mom who is a teacher meant that reading and writing were encouraged from an early age. My first clear recollection of writing was learning how to write my name. I called myself Pammy back then and all of my early works proudly displayed my name in large uneven letters. Learning to write was not necessarily difficult for me despite the fact that I never learned how to write properly. My mom still laments about the wasted pencil grips and my inability to hold a pencil in the correct fashion. Despite the fact that I write “funny” my writing is neat and easy to read. I did not experience problems from writing “funny” but I was and still am today harassed by friends and even students who ask me to show them how I write so they can try it out like I am some kind of circus freak.

Before I was in school it was just my mom and I during the day. My older siblings were three and a half and five and a half years older than me and in school by the time I was two. My dad traveled a lot and would be overseas for work for weeks at a time. During this time I used to pretend that I had homework and it almost always centered on writing. I used to draw pictures and write random letters underneath them as if they were captions that only I could make sense of. I liked to mimic my older brother and sister which aggravated them to no end; if they had homework, I had to have homework too! At dinner each night when they discussed what they did at school that day I waited in anticipation to share what I did never mind the fact that I was not in school at the time, which they were always quick to remind me of. My mom recalls these memories and hypothesizes that this early self-assigned homework was the teacher coming out in me.

When I think of writing I think of reading; I have always loved to read and from early on was encouraged to do so in a family full of readers. When I think of early authors who influenced me I fondly remember reading Ronald Dahl and Gordan Korman books; prior to that I remember having a large collection of Bereinstein Bear books; eventually I worked my way to the Sweet Valley High books, the Babysitter Clubs series, R.L. Stine novels, and by high school I was reading John Grisham and James Patterson. For me reading was an escape. Not that my childhood was terribly difficult; I have been blessed with a stable two parent household and spent summers at my family cottage on Halls Lake reading as many books as I could get my hands on when I was not in the lake or in the woods. The escape was the new worlds created by the authors that I would dream of being a part of, the intrigue I felt at what these characters went through, and the strength they had even in the most adverse situations.

Once I started to go to school I enjoyed free writing where I could write about whatever I wanted. I despised writing prompts as I felt too constricted by the directions and the repetiveness of writing and editing, writing and editing, writing and editing. Too much of my early school writing memories were focused on level two or level three tasks. However, I continued to write creatively outside of school. I would write plays and act them out with my friends; I have a vivid memory of acting out one of my works of art with two of my cousins on a coffee table in my basement. Once we had perfected it we presented it to our families only after they had bought their tickets for admission. I also liked to write short stories, drawing pictures and then creating a story to go along with them. Once my stories were complete I would assemble them into books with construction paper covers and force my little brother, who came along about three and a half years after me, to read them. I also loved spaghetti stories; I would take a piece of receipt paper and write never being constricted by the length of the page. When I finished with them I would tack them to the ceiling in my bedroom, so they would hang down like streamers for my own personal publishing party.

In high school I took a journalism class with Michelle Burress who influenced me to join the newspaper staff. My sophomore through senior year I was a reporter for the *Quaker Shaker,* thePlainfield High Schools student newspaper. I loved being a part of the organization, was voted “best quote getter” for three consecutive years in a row, and even won some state awards at Ball State’s J-Day program. Working on newspaper staff made me more confident in my writing abilities and improved my grammar and punctuation skills immensely. I was able to increase my vocabulary, learned the writing rules specific to journalism, and learned how to spell and pronounce words like an American. For a short period of time, I thought I might like to be the next big journalist, like Peter Jennings, traveling the world to report on the most critical news events, but that dream died was placed on the backburner when I decided I wanted to be a chef and go to culinary school instead. My writing genres varied but one column I did every month was the movie review. I remember going to the *Heartland Film Festival* and viewing indie films that I would probably have never seen if I had not been exposed to them by Mrs. Burress. High school was a transitional time for me, like it is for so many kids today. I moved from Toronto, Ontario to Plainfield in August of 1996 and so I started high school as the new girl with the funny accent. One way I was able to make friends was through newspaper class.

I eventually found my niche and was able to fit in and make lots of friends. My senior year of high school I was voted “most mellow” which was prior to the onset of my anal retentiveness and my desire to be an A+ student. That set in during my undergrad years at IU in Bloomington where I majored in Secondary Education with a focus on Social Studies and found myself writing paper after paper on all the amazing historical events that I was studying in my classes. I am not sure that I ever really got over my disdain for writing prompts all together but I found them to be a lot more bearable when I was able to write about something that I found interesting. I also recognized the necessity of writing well in order to do well in my courses. I was and still am (having just recently graduated) motivated by grades and my desire for perfection. I have always done well on blue book essay tests where I can express myself, but tend to attribute this to my ability to BS with the best of them. I feel like I really honed my writing skills while completing my master’s degree in Secondary Education Urban Studies at IUPUI. Now I no longer feel afraid to share. The only anxiety I get from writing is wondering whether or not I will get a good grade on my most recent paper. I really do not write for pleasure and perhaps that is why I am enrolled in this workshop. Although I feel confident as an adult writer I do not write unless I am required to do so. I am just not one of those people who like to journal or record my feelings. Perhaps I get burnt out during the school year and need the summer to rejuvenate myself. I am not sure that I will ever write for pleasure but I do know that I will continue to read for pleasure until my soul goes on to the afterlife, and who knows maybe I will continue to read there as well!